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ATTILA.

9. 25.

A PRIZE POEM,
READ IN WELLINGTON COLLEGE,

June 18th, 1874.

LONDON:
HARRISON AND SONS, ST. MARTIN'S LANE,
Printers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

1874.



* * * * *

"The triumph and the vanity,
 The rapture of the strife*,
 The earthquake voice of victory
 To thee the breath of life."

* * * * *

—BYRON.

* "Certaminis gaudia." Attila's expression before the battle of Chalons.

--CASSIODORUS.

FROM A BOOK FUND COMMEMORATING
RUTH GERALDINE ASHEN
CLASS OF 1931

It's a sad thing
when a man is to be so soon forgotten
And the shining in his soul
gone from the earth
With no thing remaining;

And it's a sad thing
when a man shall die
And forget love
which is the shiningness of life;

But it's a sadder thing
that a man shall forget love
And he not dead but walking in the field
of a May morning
And listening to the voice of the thrush.

—R.G.A., in *A Yearbook of
Stanford Writing*, 1931

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ATTILA.

I.

Pale shines the moon through silver bars of cloud,
On Danube's wave hoarse-rolling to the main;
The snow-crested Carpathians, calm and proud
In shadowed majesty o'erlook the plain;
They see man's vastest kingdoms wax and wane
Like some fair flower that lives but for a day;
But they shall keep their everlasting reign,
Unscathed, unmarred, by ruin and decay,
Till heaven, earth, and ocean all have passed away.

II.

And they have viewed that mighty empire spread,
Whose lord but now has Death's stern summons
From where the chain of Ural lifts its head
To billows of Atlantic tempest-stirred:
The northern savage trembled at his word,
And Italy's fair coronets of pine
Fear-stricken shook when his barbaric horde
Menaced the lofty peaks of Apennine,
And swept those hapless plains, the scourge of wrath.

III.

Bury him now beneath the shade of night,
Where yonder tomb awaits its honoured guest;
Clad in the armour proved in many a fight,
With Mars' great falchion slumb'ring on his breast
To wait aye ready to its lord's behest;

But ne'er again in heat of battle-fray
 What time the Hunnic arms were sorely prest,
 To flash red terror, like the lightning's play
 Wide-sweeping out its road with huge resistless sway.

IV.

Forth comes in solemn pomp the funeral train,
 Seen through the gloom by torches' pine-fed glare;
 The tithe of their dead monarch's spoil and gain,*
 Rich arms and treasures, to the tomb they bear:
 Yet not alone shall these his burial share,
 For they who dug his grave have dug their own:
 And now the chiefest warriors prepare
 To chant the death-dirge: while in sullen moan
 The mountain-side reverberates the mournful tone.

"The sun that sinks at even-tide his rays,
 Parting in golden glory from our gaze,
 While over heaven Night infolds her veil,
 And wraps in shadow forest, crag, and dale,
 Shall soon return in dawning splendour bright,
 And gladden all mankind with new-born light:
 But evermore our eyes shall long in vain
 For Him, the warrior-glories of whose reign
 Shot forth their sunbeams blazing terribly
 Through all the European vault of sky.
 For now into the darkness of the tomb
 Our Sun has sunk: and all our land is gloom.
 "Yet, hero brothers, let no woman's tear†
 Be dropped by soldiers o'er a soldier's bier!

* "The spoils of conquered nations were thrown into the grave, and the captives who had opened the ground were inhumanly massacred and buried therein."—GIBBON.

† "According to their national custom, the barbarians gashed their faces with unseemly wounds, and bewailed their valiant leader as he deserved, not with the tears of women, but with the blood of warriors."—GIBBON.

The tears he loved are those red tears that flow
 When sword or spear-stroke lays the fighter low.
 His was the joy in battle-roar to hear
 The shout of victors, crash of shield and spear ;
 Ever the foremost in the thickest fray
 He feared not death ; Death saw, and feared to slay.
 When Utus' stream with Roman blood was red,
 And Thrace's crags confessed the conquerer's tread
 What need to tell ; or* how Byzantine towers
 Fell terror-struck before the Hunnic powers,
 The toil of years one night had overthrown,
 The empire's ruin by the omen shown.

“ Let Chalons forest speak of that dark fight,
 When Goth and Hun with Goth essayed their might ;
 That fearfully fulfilled the prophecy,
 ‘ Death to the foeman ; Death and Victory.’
 The runlets clear that kissed the morning sun
 Were one red torrent ere the day was done ;
 Then thought Aetius our strength to quell ;
 How vain the thought Italian towns may tell.
 As Alpine eagle poisoning in the sky
 With hungry expectation to descry
 Some tender chamois in the vale beneath
 That strays secure, nor knows impending death,
 Grazed by the shaft of some unskilful swain
 Is but the fiercer for the moment's pain,
 Then drops upon his prey with sheer descent,
 Pain, hunger fury in his spirit blent,
 So swooped our leader from his northern home
 When trembling citizens looked forth from Rome,
 And saw against the sky the lurid glow,
 The sign of blazing cities, people's woe.
 The wealth of half the Western world was ours,

* “ The walls of Constantinople had been shaken by a recent earthquake, and the fall of fifty-eight towers had opened a large and tremendous breach. The damage indeed was speedily repaired, but this accident was aggravated by a superstitious fear that Heaven had delivered the imperial city to the Seythian shepherds.”—GIBBON.

Beneath our feet we trod the Roman powers ;
 The trader-prince whose wealth-fraught argosies
 From India to Spain had filled the seas,
 His richest treasures for a ransom gave ;
 Cunning to gain, but impotent to save.

“ So, triple-coffined let our hero sleep ;*
 The three-fold metals thus their order keep
 To symbol forth how wealth was taught to feel
 Itself how weak to cope with foemen’s steel.
 Yet, steel, nor gold, nor silver may withstand
 The chill attack of Death’s remorseless hand,
 And so at last subdued beneath its might
 The monarch lies ; and as years wing their flight,
 Hereafter ages shall inscribe his name
 In deathless letters on the scroll of fame ;
 For all mankind to read till time shall end,—
 Our **ATTILA** ; his people’s Ruler, Father, Friend.”

* * * * *

V.

“ The man whose hand stayed not for ruth nor fear,
 Whose life was one long storm of war and blood,
 Whose closest comrades were his sword and spear,
 Who made his boast that where his horse-hoofs trod,
 There nevermore might verdure clothe the sod ;
 How say you that he fought on Progress’ side,
 Who won the awful name ‘The Scourge of God,’
 Who right and might of heaven and earth defied,
 ’Gainst whom for vengeance all that guiltless blood hath cried?”

VI.

Vain questioner ! Go, ask the sea-born halls
 Whose navies o’er the main came skimming down,
 Bringing earth’s choicest treasures to her walls

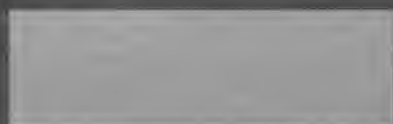
* “The remains of Attila were enclosed within three coffins, of gold, silver, and iron.”—GIBBON.

That float in marble splendour thro' the town :
 Still, still, the city holds the queenly crown
 Which erst those gallant merchant-princes won,
 And still now centuries have passed 'tis known
 That Venice rose to look upon the sun
 From out the death-fraught path of the destroying Hun

VII.

For vast and changeless through the lapse of time
 Abides the everlasting Will of One
 Who tempers all things to his ends sublime
 To reach fulfilment as the ages run ;
 And while the great world rolls her cycles on,
 The mighty movement forward still shall sway,
 Till dawn upon the gloom of night hath shone,
 And from its beams hath chased the shades away ;
 Till dawn itself shall ripen into perfect day.

GEORGE CANTRELL ALL





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